

Elmwood Public School

Sarah Osmulski
Elmwood Elementary School, Elmwood
Teacher: Mary Ann Hanlin

Elmwood's educational system began because the town was founded. Elmwood has had a private school titled Elmwood Academy and about fifteen pay schools. The first public school came after those schools and was the first tax-supported school in the area.

The Academy, established in 1854, did not last long. Though it flourished under competent management, it never was able to get tax support. Sadly, the Academy was closed due to the building of the first public school.

Pay schools more commonly known as "schoolhouses," existed all over the Elmwood area. Many no longer exist, although some have been converted into private homes.

Elmwood Public School was first built in 1866. It was the first tax-supported school in the area. The building had a wooden frame and was three stories tall. It housed five classrooms, a library, and a recitation room. Housing both elementary and high school, it cost about \$20,000.

The first high school class graduated in 1872. The number of graduates changed each year. In 1895 a fire destroyed the public school. Immediately a brick building was planned and completed by 1896. It was three stories tall and had everything needed at a cost of \$28,000. The architect was John M. Baillie. Before it was built, there was a debate whether the building should be at the same location as one unit or three buildings at different locations. It was decided to build one building at the same location as before. The grade school owned the building, but the high school rented part of it for classrooms.

In 1921, due to the Smith-Hughes Act, a classroom and laboratory were constructed for the agricultural department. The department continues today.

Edson Smith, a local businessman, gave land to the school in 1917. The land was to be used for athletic purposes. It would become a permanent athletic facility.

A gymnasium was needed and was built across from the school. It was completed in 1928 and contained a regulation basketball court, boardroom, a stage, dressing rooms, and a kitchen at the cost of \$35,000. It is currently a Community Center and Health Club.

Due to the gymnasium, space was not as big a problem as before. In the 1940s the state decided to close all of the smaller rural districts because a centralized public school served better. Student enrollment then soared from 191 to 352 due to this act. Oak Hill's grade school, the last one-room schoolhouse in the county, was combined with Elmwood in 1963.

Since there were many children enrolled in the school, the high school agreed to build another building, separate from the grade school. The land had enough space for an athletic field, and was completed by the 1953-1954 school year. After the high school moved into the new building, the grade school was remodeled to meet the expansion needs. Additional classrooms were provided due to amount of students enrolled.

The high school and grade schools were brought together as one district in 1969-1970.

The Elmwood Community District No. 322 had about the same rules as the former high school district. In 1973 the grades 5-8 from Edwards were moved to Elmwood. New classrooms were built at the side of the grade school. In 1981 Edwards Grade School was closed, and the rest of the school was transported to the Elmwood grade school.

The seventh and eighth grades of Elmwood were moved to a new addition of the high school in 1982, while the grades K-6 were kept in the 1896 building. The high school athletic field was restored in the 1990s and was dedicated in honor of L. Richard Whitney for his service to the school. An all-purpose track and field with sidewalk, a concession stand, fencing, a new press box and turnstile entrances were built. It is still in use today. The effort of the school and community earned a Governor's Hometown Award in 2000.

By the 1990s the grade school was in need of a new building. Funding was received from the Life Health Safety Bonds. The building was to meet state regulations, and was to be attached to the high school and junior high. It was ready by the 1993-1994 school year at a cost of \$1,127,000. The building included a computer lab and library, a multipurpose room (gymnasium and cafeteria), 19 classrooms, storage rooms, restrooms, a kitchen, a teachers' workroom and lunchroom, a nurses' room, and two offices. It is currently in use and houses 350 students. When the 1896 building was vacated, five local developers from the Next Century Development Corporation bought the building. It was changed into apartments, and the gymnasium was transformed into a Community Center. It was finished in 1994 and is still in use today.

Elmwood Public School was built because of a great desire to educate the young people of the community. That desire still exists today. I am new to the community and writing this article gave me a feeling for the ideas going on in people's heads when the school was first built, and the same ideas that are going on today. [From Elmwood 2004; Elmwood 2006; and Elmwood Gazette, Jan. 23, 1896.]